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SUBJECT: COWS VERSUS CROPS: GOVERNMENT RESPONDS TO  
"ILLEGAL" PASTORALISTS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The recent government crack down on the influx of pastoralist migrants occupying privately-owned land in Laikipia is a short term solution to a very complex problem. Scarce resources and poor management of them will continue to drive desperate pastoralists to seek much needed water and pasture wherever they can find it, inevitably bringing them into conflict with other communities. A recent peace initiative following the government crackdown is cause for some hope, but it remains to be seen if the government will be able to dedicate the necessary attention and resources to develop a more-lasting solution to the underlying causes of the communal violence. End Summary.

Scarce Resources Drive Pastoralists South  
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¶2. (U) The effects of drought have driven pastoralist communities, primarily Samburu and Pokot, southwards from their semi-arid grazing lands in the north of Kenya in search of water and pasture for their herds. Large numbers of Pokot and Samburu herders have wandered into Laikipia district, where supplies of both are more abundant, creating escalating conflict with farmers and landowners. The pastoralists have little experience with the concept of private property, as most of the land in their home districts is held commonly as trust land.

¶3. (U) This land in Laikipia is predominantly owned by ethnic Kikuyu, the tribe which benefited the most from the post-colonial land distribution policies of the government of then President Kenyatta (an ethnic Kikuyu). Much of the land is divided into large, privately-owned ranches, which the pastoralists perceive as being unoccupied, irrespective of ownership, and therefore available for grazing. Additionally, growing population pressure among the residents of Central Kenya (also primarily ethnic Kikuyu) to the south of Laikipia has resulted in an expansion of Kikuyu-cultivated land out to the margins of traditional settlements in Laikipia, bringing farmers into more frequent contact with pastoral migrations.

Government Cracks Down, Speaker Objects  
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¶4. (U) As the "invading" pastoralist herds caused damage to crops and land, land-owners appealed to the government to take action to protect their property rights. In early

October, the government began forcibly evicting pastoralists and their herds from the privately-owned land in the northern Laikipia district. The government's tactics were heavy-handed, and pastoralists and their advocates fought back, organizing demonstrations against the evictions. Even Speaker of Parliament Francis Ole Kaparo (a land-owner in the affected area and himself an ethnic Maasai) rose to the defense of his fellow pastoralists. Kaparo accused the government of targeting the pastoralist communities for ill-treatment, even indiscriminately evicting pastoralists with legitimate land titles in the area. He went so far as to threaten to resign from the government if the administration did not stop "harassing" pastoralist communities and properly address their grievances.

15. (U) The Speaker's bold challenge to the government focused national attention on the situation and prompted President Kibaki to intervene to reduce tensions. A meeting at State House between government officials and community leaders produced an agreement to evict only illegal grazers, allowing those with titles to remain, and dictated that such evictions should be carried out in a humane manner. Recognizing that insecurity in the region contributes to the conflict, the leaders also proposed a meeting of pastoralist community leaders to discuss methods to reduce conflict between pastoralist communities.

#### Silver-Linings: Peace Initiatives for the Region

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16. (U) The national attention on the Laikipia conflict provided the much needed impetus to bring together communities to discuss broader conflict issues. Traditionally, the Samburu and Pokot communities clash over

territorial control and grazing rights. Conflict between these two communities escalates in times of scarcity, as they fight over dwindling access to water and grazing lands. The drought-prone Samburu and Pokot districts of the Rift Valley have witnessed mounting conflict in the preceding months, with instances of cattle-raiding on both sides on the rise. This mounting insecurity disrupts traditional grazing patterns and forces herders to seek pastures farther afield from their homesteads, bringing them into potential conflict with the inhabitants of the land they occupy.

17. (U) In dealing with the Laikipia land-owners, however, the Samburu and Pokot made common cause. In mid-October, Samburu and Pokot leaders who had gathered to discuss ways to resolve the long-standing conflicts between their communities agreed on a peace accord. They agreed to expand dialogue through subsequent meetings, committed to avoid inflammatory rhetoric, and recognized certain disputed grazing rights. The agreement also contains several appeals to the government, primarily to open more grazing areas, extend road networks, and resettle displaced pastoralists.

18. (SBU) Comment: Though laudable, the Samburu-Pokot peace initiative will require the full support of local and national authorities to ensure that the resources necessary to achieve these ambitious plans are made available. Conflict between the pastoralists has a long, turbulent, and largely ignored history. It took a well-respected politician's intervention and his threatened resignation to garner the requisite national attention to the problem. Merely forcing the invading herders from areas of potential conflict falls far short of addressing the underlying causes of the conflict. While competition for scarce resources among pastoral communities is certain to continue given their reliance on the notoriously unreliable bounty of the land, the intensity of these conflicts can be mitigated by strong community leadership and sound government policies aimed at alleviating some of the exacerbating factors which contribute to instability in the region. Judging by past performance, however, these may be in short supply.

RANNEBERGER